

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS DHAKA 001146

SIPDIS

FOR I/FW, B/G, IIP/G/NEA-SA, B/VOA/N (BANGLA SERVICE) STATE
FOR SA/PAB, SA/PPD (LSCSNSNY, SSTRYKER), SA/RA, INR/R/MR,
AND PASS TO USAID FOR ANE/ASIA/SA/B (WJOHNSON)

CINCPAC FOR PUBLIC DIPLOMACY ADVISOR, J51 (MAJ TURNER), J45
(MAJ NICHOLLS)

USARPAC FOR APOP-IM (MAJ HEDRICK)

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KMDR](#) [KPAO](#) [PREL](#) [BG](#) [OCII](#)

SUBJECT: FINANCE MINISTER RAHMAN AND INDUSTRIES
MINISTER/JAMAAT ISLAMI LEADER NIZAMI DENOUNCE BANGLADESHI
MEDIA AS "IMAGE KILLERS"

1. During March 12-14, Finance Minister Saifur Rahman and
Industries Minister Motiur Rahman Nizami, who is also leader
of ruling coalition partner Jamaat Islami, denounced the

Bangladeshi press for allegedly promoting a false and
negative image of Bangladesh.

2. Rahman charged that Bangladesh's 100-150 daily
newspapers have corrupted Bangladesh's image through
"misguided headlines," and belittled journalists as educated
people unable to find employment anywhere else. He accused
them of deliberately writing erroneous or slanted reports
criticizing the government. The "international community,"
he alleged, gives a one-sided impression of the country when
it criticizes Bangladesh's corruption and governance
problems. Rahman also complained that foreign diplomats
have been violating "diplomatic norms" by involving
themselves in internal political issues. (Note: He was
referring to an interview given by the German ambassador.)

3. Nizami joined the fray when he stated that the "over
exercise of democracy and press freedom" has resulted in
Bangladesh's worldwide image crisis. He lamented that "our
success story could not make space in the international
media."

4. Bangladeshi newspapers responded forcefully. Widely
read English and Bangla papers accused him of "media
bashing" and making "vitriolic remarks against the press."
One anonymous commentator stated that the image of the
country "is built on good governance, transparency in
government dealings, the rule of law, fulfilling commitments
and not demonstrating an ostrich-like attitude. when it
comes to facing unpalatable facts." An unusually direct
editorial cartoon on the front page of the prominent "Daily
Star" depicted Rahman exclaiming, "You journalist scum are
destroying `our' image," and a religious leader next to him
urging, "Ban them." In the background, Bangladesh's "image"
is a corrupt government official, an Islamic militant, and a
thief riding atop an emaciated tiger while the "Clown
Prince" (PM Zia's son Tarique Rahman) eats from the tiger's
food bowl.

5. Another Bangla daily rejected charges of inaccurate
reporting. It countered: "Jamaat leader Nizami is angry at
the excessive practice of democracy and the freedom of the
press. Does he want to limit the practice of democracy and
curb the freedom of the press?" It also suggested "Finance
Minister Saifur Rahman said the newspapers do not want
farmers to receive a fair price for their commodities. Let
us tell the Finance Minister: farmers are deprived of a fair
price because of extortion, bribery by the police and the
lack of transport facilities, not because of the media."

6. Comment: BDG officials have long charged that negative
media reporting stems from the influence of the opposition
Awami League and of India. Rahman is periodically
cantankerous on a wide range of issues, while Nizami's
charge that anti-government reporting represents an abuse of
freedom is an accurate reflection of his limited vision of
democracy.

Thomas